

Trinity Sunday

Lectionary B, (John 3:1-17)

Trinity Church, May 27, 2018

Beyond Words – The
Holy Trinity

One of the characteristics of Celtic spirituality is its robust enthusiasm for the Holy Trinity. Our opening hymn this morning expresses that so well. “I bind unto myself today the strong Name of the Trinity, by invocation of the same, the Three in One, and One in Three.”

This text has been attributed to St. Patrick, Bishop and Missionary to Ireland back in the 5th century. Whether he actually composed it or not, the text expresses his faith and zeal which has been a part of Celtic spirituality to this day. Knowing God in Trinity of Person, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, reiterates the faith of the Church declared by the Council of Nicaea in 325. This formula, from the twenty-eighth chapter of Matthew, is the prescription used by Christians to initiate people into the Body of Christ and is the

foundation for our creeds. God is understood to be one God in three persons.

Today is Trinity Sunday, the only Sunday of the church year devoted to a doctrine rather than an event in Jesus' life. While this doctrine is almost impossible to explain, it may be good that it is beyond our comprehension. God is beyond our comprehension, and descriptions of God always fall short. If they don't, we've described an idol, not God. God manages to be known by us but is not fully understood. We can proclaim that God is for us as a

creating Father, was seen in Jesus, and that the Spirit of God is experienced in our lives. But that reality cannot be captured by words. We can just as easily refer to God as Creator, Redeemer, and Giver of Life. Those too are creedal words. To know God as a nurturing Mother is also valid. Julian of Norwich, the great English 14th century mystic, from her visions would express the nature of God not only as Father but as Mother. “As truly as God is our Father, so truly God is our Mother.” Julian even spoke of “Jesus our true Mother in nature,

from our first creation, and He is our true Mother in grace by His taking our created human nature.” The Spirit too in Christian tradition is sometimes represented with feminine imagery.

This recognition that God is more than the words we use to describe God is also a characteristic of Celtic spirituality. While boldly proclaiming God in Trinity of Persons, this God is enmeshed in the created order. God moves within creation. God is not a tree, but all living things express the wonder of the Creator. While a true image of God remains

a mystery, we are nevertheless
made in the image of that Mystery.
The Divine Self is within all selves
– within us, to be discovered and
enjoyed.

We miss so much if we think
of God only in religious language.
God is meant to be experienced in
every aspect of life, with or
without a holy label. Beauty, for
example is a gift from God and an
expression of God's presence with
us. We can see it, hear it, touch,
smell, and taste it. As Philip
Newell expresses it in a modern
Celtic prayer:

“That in the elements of earth,
sea and sky

I may see your beauty,
that in wild winds, birdsong
and silence

I may hear your beauty,
that in the body of another
and the interminglings
of relationship

I may touch your beauty,
that in the moisture of the
earth and its flowering
and fruiting

I may smell your beauty,
these things I look for this
day, O God,

these things I look for.”

(“Sounds of the Eternal”)

The challenge for us is to look for God in all things. It’s not enough to limit God to the confines of theological language. Unfortunately, trust in that discipline often leads to divisiveness. Devout people tend to believe that their description of God is the only valid image, with the result that those who see God from a different perspective are designated heretics. We need to remember that the Divine Self lives even within those to whom we give bad names. God will not

be corralled by doctrines, gender or racial imagery, ecclesiastical rules or rubrics. God is free to be known in all of life, to set us free from all that would bind us to destructive behavior and hopelessness.

The truth of God, after all, is not to be found in propositions or ecclesiastical resolutions. Truth is not a static absolute somewhere out there that we bring down as a rule demanding our obedience. As Edward Hays puts it, sacred words only live as they “pass through the unique prism of each person.” (The Ethiopian Tattoo Shop, p. 92) The

words must become flesh, just as Jesus was the Word made flesh. Truth, therefore, as Jesus spoke of it, is known in a living relationship with the author of our Being -- with the Holy Trinity. It is not a relationship that gives us the answers to all our questions. Rather, it is a relationship of trust that allows us to live with the questions. Security will not be found by adherence to a creed. Instead, we are invited to live in the realm of insecurity where God alone is the source of ultimate confidence.

In short, to live in relationship with the Trinity is to live within the reign of God's love. That love is not static but permeates all life, continually luring us to participate in the beauty of God. This is not primarily a matter of philosophical speculation. It is participation in divine action that is continually challenging and inspiring us so that we may move into intimacy with God. This process will take more than a life time, but it is a journey filled with love, peace, and joy.